
GANZ - #21 - REWILDING THE WORD (AUGUST 2026)



2 Timothy 4 (NJB): ⁶ As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart. ⁷ I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; ⁸ all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing. ¹

Eric Hoffer² (1902-1983): “When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other.”

¹ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 2 Ti 4:6-8.

² **Eric Hoffer (July 25, 1902 – May 21, 1983)** was an American philosopher and social critic. A moderate with an atypical working-class background, Hoffer wrote ten books over his career and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in February 1983.

1 Kings 3 (NJB): It pleased Yahweh that Solomon should have asked for this. ¹¹ ‘Since you have asked for this,’ God said, ‘and not asked for long life for yourself or riches or the lives of your enemies but have asked for a discerning judgement for yourself, ¹² here and now I do what you ask. I give you a heart wise and shrewd as no one has had before and no one will have after you.’³

St. John Henry Newman (1801-1890), Doctor of the Church, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Volume I, Sermon 4 “On Secret Faults” – “First of all, *self-knowledge* does not come as a matter of course; it implies an effort and a work. As well may we suppose that the knowledge of the languages comes by nature, as that acquaintance with our own heart is natural. Now the very effort of steadily reflecting, is itself painful to many men; not to speak of the difficulty of reflecting correctly. To ask ourselves *why* we do this or that, to take account of the principles which govern us, and see whether we act for conscience’ sake or from some lower inducement, is painful. We are busy in the world, and what leisure time we have we readily devote to a less severe and wearisome employment.”⁴

A Story

As *Odyssey* has made its way into theaters in the past few weeks, I recall how in my early twenties, I took a Course at Gonzaga University on Homeric⁵ Greek (an earlier form of Greek, sometimes call Archaic Greek, which was current from 800 to 500 BCE). We used a wonderful textbook designed and published by two Jesuits, Schoder, SJ and Horrigan, SJ.⁶ But I already knew the story and had my imagination populated with so many of the dramatic images from the adventures of Odysseus and his men, all of

³ [*The New Jerusalem Bible*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 1 Ki 3:10-12.

⁴ John Henry Newman, [*Parochial and Plain Sermons*](#), vol. 1 (London; Oxford; Cambridge: Rivingtons, 1868), 49-50.

⁵ **Homer**, the Archaic Greek writer of both the *Iliad* (c. 750-725 BCE) and the *Odyssey* (c. 725-675 BCE), lived it appears sometime during the 8th century (BCE). He is the first European poet. As the *Columbia Encyclopedia* notes: “Two epic poems are attributed to Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They are composed in a literary type of Greek, Ionic in basis with Aeolic admixtures. Ranked among the great works of Western literature, these two poems together constitute the prototype for all subsequent Western epic poetry.” [Paul Lagassé, Columbia University, *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York; Detroit: Columbia University Press; Sold and distributed by Gale Group, 2000).]

⁶ This textbook is still in circulation and has been revised by Leslie Collins Edwards and published in 2005.

whom were trying to get back home. Only one of them did get home.⁷ The *Odyssey* (a kid's version), the tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and Robin Hood were stories that I read over and over again in my youth.

Tell me the tale of a man, Muse, who had so many roundabout ways
to wander, driven off course, after sacking Troy's hallowed keep;
Many the peoples whose cities he saw and whose ways of thinking he learned,
Many the toils he suffered at sea, anguish in his heart
As he struggled to safeguard his life and the homecoming of his companions.
(Mendelsohn, 2025)

There is a difference between, on the one hand, being regularly lost and frustrated and confused by one's life and its circumstances and, on the other hand, being taught by one's life and strengthened in it through all circumstances, and eventually through "the awful grace of God" becoming wise.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**wise**" – **1.a.i. - Old English** – Having or exercising sound judgement or discernment; capable of judging truly concerning what is right or fitting and disposed to act accordingly; having the ability to perceive and adopt the best means for accomplishing an end; characterized by good sense and prudence. Opposed to *foolish*.

And this difference, I propose, is directly related to a person's capacity to understand his or her ultimate destination, his or her ultimate *whither* if you will; that is, the *where to*. For Christians, this ultimate end is Heaven ... but not in the sense of *place*; that is, a place far removed from Earth, from this "vale of tears" as a prayer puts it, but in the sense of *a depth of relationship with God* that nothing can shake, that even here opens for us a new world (the "other world") of meaning and purpose. This is our goal and our single-hearted attachment in which we can find an analogy in Odysseus' relationship with Penelope and hers with him.

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 10: "If you read history, then you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. *It is since*

⁷ The *Columbia Encyclopedia*: **Itháki (ēthá'kē) or Ithaca (īth'əka)**, island (1991 pop. 3,082), c.37 sq mi (96 sq km), W Greece, one of the IONIAN ISLANDS. It is mountainous, rising to c.2,650 ft (810 m) at Mt. Anoyi, and has little arable land. The chief products are olive oil, currants, and wine. The main town is Itháki (1991 pop. 1,714), located on the island's east coast. The island is traditionally celebrated as the home of ODYSSEUS. [Paul Lagassé, Columbia University, *The Columbia Encyclopedia* (New York; Detroit: Columbia University Press; Sold and distributed by Gale Group, 2000).]

Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you will get neither." (My emphasis.)

Or to use other language, knowing one's ultimate destination gives meaning to what we have had to endure for the sake of getting to our End. That End is the WHY.

Performed by Rascal Flatts, "The Broken Road"⁸ –

I set out on a narrow way many years ago
Hoping I would find true love along the broken road
But I got lost a time or two
Wiped my brow and kept pushing through
I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you

That every long-lost dream led me to where you are
Others who broke my heart, they were like Northern stars
Pointing me on my way into your loving arms
This much I know is true
That God blessed the broken road
That led me straight to you
Yes, He did

Even the most relentlessly difficult circumstances in a person's life are given meaning when one can know that this is *how* I get to where I most long to go. As Fr. Moreland, SJ once told my much younger self (who was still too young to understand what he meant), "Rick, the Cross was not *in* the way of God's purposes in the world, it *was* the way."

The very difficult obstacles that stood in the way of Odysseus' homecoming are vividly painted with "winged words" by Homer, the master Storyteller. When I was younger, it was those "adventures", each in turn, that I remembered and loved to re-read. But from Odysseus' perspective, those heroic adventures included devastating personal losses and impossible choices. Think of all those boats with which he set out from Troy, filled with men, with his men, all longing for home – "As he struggled to safeguard his life and the homecoming of his companions." – not one of whom made it home but he. If any person, mythical or actual, had such losses in his or her life, we could feel compassion for him or her if despair devoured them, leaving them feeling that their life had been evacuated of meaning, feeling that their life had been cursed.

⁸ Written by Bobby E. Boyd, Jeff Hanna, and Marcus Hummon.

Aeschylus (525-456 BCE)⁹, *Agamemnon* -

Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget
falls drop by drop upon the heart,
until, in our own despair,
against our will,
comes wisdom
through the awful grace of God.”¹⁰

A scholar once taught me – I think that it was a former Jesuit, Thomas Cahill – that *Odyssey* is not so much Odysseus’ story as it is Penelope’s story (notice how the story begins and ends with her, as if to make this clear). Without her (and their son) as the anchor of Odysseus’ life – *she is his whither and why* – those twenty years could only have been construed as “lost” years, years filled with inconsolable losses and with his memory filled with such awful images of human beings at their worst. Odysseus’ relationship with Penelope, and her faithfulness to him, is what gives *Odyssey* its greatness and enduring importance to the human community.

A Text – “Ithaca”¹¹ by C.P. Cavafy, translated by Daniel Mendelsohn (1863-1933)

⁹ Logos AI notes: “His most celebrated achievement is the Oresteia trilogy – comprising *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides* – performed in 458 B.C. This work is widely regarded as the greatest Athenian tragedy because of its expansive scope, intricate structure, and profound exploration of human suffering and the nature of justice. Unlike some of his other plays, the three tragedies in this trilogy formed an integrated dramatic cycle unified by shared mythology and thematic concerns.”

¹⁰ These magnificent lines are a loose translation of these lines from Aeschylus by the eminent scholar and mythologist, Edith Hamilton. They were quoted to extraordinary effect by Robert F. Kennedy on 4 April 1968 in an impromptu speech he gave to a predominantly black crowd a few minutes after the news of the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. came through to him.

¹¹ A note on this poem by Daniel Mendelsohn: “An early version was written in 1894; the present version was composed in October 1910 and published in November of the following year. The addressee of the poem is Homer’s Odysseus, the quintessential Greek wanderer with a quintessentially Greek mind: curious, avid, hungry for knowledge and experience. In the *Odyssey*, the monsters that Odysseus encounters on his ten-year voyage home from Troy include man-eating giants called LAESTRYGONIANS, as well as Polyphemus, one of the race of CYCLOPS (primitive, cannibalistic giants), whom Odysseus blinds in a famous episode recounted in Book 9 of the poem. Because Polyphemus is actually a son of the sea god POSEIDON, Poseidon vengefully pursues Odysseus thereafter, causing storms and shipwrecks, and punishing those who help the hero on his way home. The poverty of the rocky island kingdom of Ithaca was proverbial in the Homeric poems and ruefully alluded to by its inhabitants; and yet (as Telemachus, Odysseus’s son, remarks in Book 4 of the *Odyssey*) beloved of its people.” [Cavafy, C.P. *Complete Poems of C. P. Cavafy* (pp. 472-473). Kindle Edition.]

As you set out on the way to Ithaca
hope that the road is a long one,
filled with adventures, filled with discoveries.
The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
Poseidon in his anger: do not fear them,
you won't find such things on your way
so long as your thoughts remain lofty, and a choice
emotion touches your spirit and your body.
The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes,
savage Poseidon; you won't encounter them
unless you stow them away inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up before you.

Hope that the road is a long one.
Many may the summer mornings be
when – with what pleasure, with what joy –
you first put in to harbors new to your eyes;
may you stop at Phoenician trading posts
and there acquire the finest wares:
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and heady perfumes of every kind:
as many heady perfumes as you can.
Many Egyptian cities may you visit
that you may learn, and go on learning, from their sages.

Always in your mind keep Ithaca.
To arrive there is your destiny.
But do not hurry your trip in any way.
Better that it last for many years;
that you drop anchor at the island an old man,
rich with all you've gotten on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Ithaca gave you the beautiful journey;
without her you wouldn't have set upon the road.
But now she has nothing left to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca didn't deceive you.
As wise as you will have become, with so much experience,
you will understand, by then, these Ithacas; what they mean. [1910; 1911]

A Close Reading of the Text

Normally I would here do a close reading of the text above (Cavafy's poem in this case). But because of all that I have already articulated, I will let this magnificent poem stand unremarked.

A Prayer

1 For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who Thee by faith before the world confessed;
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

2 Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

(1864, by William Walsham How)